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A description of an assembly program for sixth grade students which focuses on areas of government that directly affect students is presented. Students and teachers of the 85 sixth grade classes in the city were asked to suggest topics of interest to them in the area of "Our Schools and Our Government." These suggestions were incorporated into a teacher's outline for use in classrooms the following year. An account of accomplishments in each classroom was prepared by the students and presented to a general assembly composed of an elected delegate from each of the 85 classes. A resolution was passed by the delegates with amendments relative to the topic, and the amended resolution was voted upon. The delegates gave an account of the proceedings and decisions upon return to their classrooms.

Objectives of the total program are outlined. These include the development of skills in interpersonal relationships, group participation, and representative government. An evaluation of the project is presented along with a proposed program for the following year focusing on the area of the interrelated attitudes of the children and various cultural groups.

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SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Springfield, Massachusetts

September, 1964

Subject: Springfield Elementary School Assembly

To: Elementary Principals and Sixth Grade Teachers

This bulletin contains information centering around two topics:

1. A brief description of last year's Elementary School Assembly in its entire scope.

2. The proposed plan for the continuation of the assembly program for this year.

In January of 1963, Springfield's Superintendent of Schools suggested that there would be value in an assembly of sixth grade children to discuss areas of government which would directly affect children. (This assembly was to be patterned after the Tufts Assembly on Massachusetts Government.) The Tufts Assembly on Massachusetts Government is an attempt to provide an objective atmosphere for informed discussion on urgent issues affecting our State Government. Civic leaders and participating voters are prepared for the topics proposed for discussion which takes place in April at Tufts University. This assembly brings together a representative group on a state-wide basis; delegates having differing viewpoints offer alternative solutions to vital problems. Hopefully, recommendations which will help to mold public opinion for the betterment of state government will arise from this group effort. Two elementary school principals investigated the educational possibilities and guided the project.

On January 25, 1963, a bulletin was sent to 85 sixth grade teachers in Springfield outlining the proposal. The title decided upon was "Our Schools and Government." Since a study of local, state and national government is normally a part of our sixth grade curriculum, the project would be expected to both enrich and supplement the regular classroom work.

To be of any real value it was necessary that the topics discussed should closely relate to what sixth grade children thought were important in this area. In order to ascertain this, on February 4, 1963, sixth grade teachers were asked, with their children, to suggest topics which could be studied the following September and incorporated into the Assembly program.

Suggestions from the sixth grade children were incorporated verbatim in a teachers' outline given to sixth grade teachers on September 4, 1963.

Each sixth grade (involving some 2500 children) used these topics as a basis of study until October 15. An account of what was accomplished in each classroom was prepared by the children and submitted on the day of the assembly. Each classroom also elected a delegate to attend the assembly as a representive of his or her class.

The assembly, involving 85 children, took place at 9:30 a.m. at a centrally located school. The superintendent led the discussion which resulted in certain resolutions being adopted. The procedure followed during the assembly was as follows:

1. A number of topics taken from the teaching outline were flashed on the screen by means of an overhead projector.
2. The group selected a topic to discuss.
3. The discussion followed. Great care was taken by Dr. McCook that his comments were limited to rephrasing a delegate's statements and did not sway the thinking of the group.
4. A resolution was made.
5. Amendments were made to the resolution and accepted or rejected by the group.
6. The amended resolution was voted on.

The reactions of the delegates were immediately recorded on their return to their classrooms from the assembly. They expressed an overwhelming enthusiasm for the assembly, showed real interest in what children from other parts of the city thought, and indicated an earnest desire for its continuation on an annual

basis. Suggestions were made by these children that the number of topics be narrowed, that more time be given to the discussion of each topic and that there might be some advantage in limiting the size of the group.

Arrangements were made to meet again with the delegates of this assembly to review parlimentary procedure, to evaluate the assembly in depth, and to make plans for a continuation of this type of project next year.

Since January of 1963, children in the various sixth grade classrooms in Springfield were given ample opportunity to develop the objectives which follow in practical situations. In addition, these children also gained wide experience in the use of the work-study skills.

Children had ample opportunity to define specific problems and to attempt to solve these problems through:

a. reference material (radio, T.V., newspapers, library)

b. conducting interviews with resource people in the community

c. field trips

d. classroom discussion.

There was further experience given in organizing, evaluating and presenting the acquired information.

OBJECTIVES

To give children practical experience in the use of those skills needed for successful group participation.

To develop skills in:

1. Interpersonal relationships

   A. Assuming responsibilities for group tasks

   B. Courtesy

   C. Accepting opinions and rights of others

   D. Playing fair

   E. Taking turns

F. Suggesting to the group

G. Accepting criticism

H. Helping keep discussion to the point

I. Adjusting ideas and behavior to the changing situation

J. Using social amenities

K. Accepting disappointment or failure

2. Group participation:

A. Dividing responsibilities

B. Accepting and suggesting compromise

C. Accepting responsibilities

D. Anticipating consequences of group decisions and actions

E. Acting to further group purposes

F. Developing a willingness to accept the majority opinion

G. Followership and leadership

H. The parlimentary procedure

3. In Representative Government:

A. Selection of qualified representatives

B. Understanding the responsibilities shared between the representative and his constituents

C. Recognizing the need for a system of checks and balances in government.

EVALUATION

The project, culminated by the assembly, has been judged to be worthwhile and very successful by the classroom teachers, participants in the assembly, and parents and principals. They felt that this project provided a "grass roots" approach to the teaching of the social and study skills directly through pupil's participation and interests. It is also believed that many important learnings were acquired, and avenues explored, which would not and could not have been done through other media.

Suggestions for improvement were:

1. Fewer areas to explore in the classroom
2. More time for children to study the areas
3. Area meetings of delegates

It is intended that the above suggestions will be considered in a similar project in 1964-1965.

This project and substantiating data was submitted for consideration of a Freedom's Foundation Award at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, October, 1963.

PROPOSED PLAN FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR 1964-65

As an outgrowth of last year's assembly, a much narrower field of study is to be selected for the coming year. Many of the original suggestions for possible topics given by the children centered around attitudes toward various cultural groups. In the light of this topic's importance on the national scene and particularly Springfield's interest in human relations, it is proposed that this area receive full attention in our assembly program this year.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Interrelated attitudes of child and various cultural groups.

1. Does discrimination exist in our community?
2. How are differences in race, color, and creed met and worked out?
3. How can we better share the parts of various cultures?
4. How can we provide opportunities for children from various parts of the city to come together and discuss problems?
5. What do we mean, "Cultural groups should also respect the individual rights of others"?
6. What are the problems and conditions of the different groups and do we understand and appreciate them?
7. How can a community develop in each person a respect and concern for all?
8. Has the child learned to play, study, and work, and live with Americans who have different colored skin, religion, or amounts of money?

9. Does he recognize the contributions of various cultural groups that have made our nation what it is today?

It is expected that, having explored each of the topics in depth, children will have not only gained awareness and knowledge of other cultural groups, but also have gained some conceptual ideas regarding the role and responsibility of the individual. In addition, some emphasis should be given to possible ways of resolving intra-group tensions and preserving the dignity of the individual.

Selected references for teachers are listed

Conant, James B., Slums and Suburbs. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc. 1961.

Harrington, Michael, The Other America.

Passaw, Harry A., Education In Depressed Areas. Bureau of Publications: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963.

University of the State of New York, Inter-Group Relations. Albany, New York: State Education Dept., 1963.

Riessman, Frank, The Culturally Deprived Child. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Community resources should also be utilized wherever applicable.

In order to follow through on the suggestions made by children for improving the assembly, small area assemblies will be held during February. Delegates will attend a city-wide assembly in April. It is anticipated that this schedule will provide sufficient time for a study in depth, of these topics. The details of assembly organization will be provided at a later date.

Thomas J. Donahoe
Richard G. Martin
Co-chairmen of the Elementary School Assembly

Approved:
Dr. Alice B. Beal
Deputy Superintendent